

Scottish Mesh Survivors

Fighting to save Women from suffering in Future



by Marion Scott

The life changing injuries suffered by women injured by mesh implants have been described as a bigger scandal than Thalidomide.

Hundreds of thousands of women around the world have suffered injury after being treated with polypropylene mesh implants for bladder problems and pelvic organ prolapse.

Thousands have been left with extensive nerve damage leaving them crippled and confined to wheelchairs.

Others have suffered organ perforation and face dozens of operations to remove the plastic mesh implant which turns brittle and cuts through tissue like cheese wire.

In a powerful speech to the Australian parliament in November, Senator Derryn Hinch pulled no punches when he compared the global scandal to Thalidomide, the morning sickness drug prescribed in the late 50's and early 60's which left thousands of babies.

Demanding an Australian senate inquiry, he said: "These devices have ruined the lives of women around the world, but many were left in the dark and told their pain is psychosomatic.

"I put mesh into the same category as Thalidomide as once again, drug companies and medical watchdogs are letting victims down and women around the world are suffering."

Campaigners warn the true scale of the mesh disaster may still take years to be fully revealed as injuries can take more than a decade to develop.

Elaine Holmes of Scottish Mesh Survivors said: "Injuries can happen immediately.

"I woke up from what was described to me as a routine operation in agonising pain, and I've been left crippled.

the problem.

"We are lucky in Scotland that we have several politicians like Senator Hinch who are prepared to speak out and tell it like it is!"

So far around the world, only Scotland has put the brakes on use of the controversial implants, despite medical manufacturers paying over £1.5 billion in claims and compensation in the US.

From last year, three of the four mesh implants once routinely used in hospitals here on around 2,000 women a year, are no longer offered unless agreed by a multidisciplinary medical team.

New medical reports say the remaining implant, mesh tape to treat stress urinary incontinence, shows more long term effects than non-mesh surgery.

An independent safety review, due to be published very soon, will decide whether that implant will continue to be routinely available.

Injured patients are campaigning to have all mesh withdrawn, and EU watchdogs are recommending all mesh, including hernia mesh, should be reclassified as 'high risk'.

Scottish Health Committee Chairman Neil Findlay MSP describes the scandal as 'one of the worst medical disasters of

"These devices have ruined the lives of women around the world"

Derryn Hinch



"Others can take ten years, some even fifteen for the mesh to move within the body and cause pain and injury.

"I believe we are only just seeing the tip of the iceberg as far as injuries and deaths from mesh.

He lambasted doctors, medical watchdogs and manufacturers for letting women down 'once again'.

"Medical watchdogs around the world have let patients down by keeping their head in the sand over the true scale of

“One of the worst medical disasters of our time”

Neil Findlay



our time’.

He has asked police to investigate allegations counterfeit mesh from China has been used by at least one US implant manufacturer, Boston Scientific, which supplied hospitals across Scotland.

Boston Scientific have denied the allegations and repeatedly insisted they have always acted in the best interests of patients.

But after meeting with top US medical negligence lawyer Steve Mostyn, West Lothian MSP Findlay handed a dossier to Police Scotland and asked them to investigate.

Both Labour MSP Findlay and Scottish Conservative MSP Jackson Carlaw have repeatedly lambasted the UK’s medical watchdog the Medicines Healthcare Regulatory Agency for their ‘failure’ to protect patients or grasp the enormity of the situation.

The MHRA continue to state the benefits of using mesh implants ‘outweigh the risks’ despite admission that doctors failed to report injuries patients.

It has been left to injured patients to sound the alarm.

Scottish Mesh Survivors, led by Elaine Holmes and Olive McIlroy, have received accolades for their Hear Our Voice campaign which sparked a national independent safety review.

The women have also played a major role in developing new patient information leaflets and consent forms which spell out each and every danger in accessible language, allowing women to learn the true failure rate for the first time.

Elaine, 52, from Newton Mearns, said: “Most of the women given a mesh implant were never warned exactly what the side effects could be.

“Many weren’t even told they were being given a mesh implant, or that it was a permanent device being placed inside their bodies.

“If we had been told the truth, that as many as 1 in 5 of us would suffer devastating side effects, who would have made the choice to take that chance?”

When the woman began their campaign three years ago, they faced huge opposition from doctors angry they were being challenged.

Elaine said: “We don’t think many appreciated patients telling them they made mistakes.

“How many thousands of women around the world have suffered life changing injuries because the medical professionals refused to listen and carried on using mesh implants?”

Olive McIlroy, 59, from Renfrew, said: “We’ve been fighting to save women in the future from suffering the life changing injuries which have devastated our own lives.

“So many of us have had to give up work because we’re in so much pain, women have lost their careers, their homes, even their marriages because



**Scottish Mesh Survivors
Elaine Holmes and
Olive McIlroy**

“New medical studies have proved we were right.

“But we’ve had to fight tooth and nail for those reports to be included in the safety review which show mesh implants have more long term adverse effects than non-mesh procedures.

“It saddens us it’s taken so long for those studies to recognise what we’ve known all along.

“Failure to protect patients or grasp the enormity of the situation”

Jackson Carlaw



Scottish Mesh Survivors continued

of the devastating effects of mesh implants.

"We are just ordinary women, we never dreamed we would have to take on such a battle or challenge the most powerful surgeons, medical manufacturers, and even government watchdogs.

"It's been a long hard road, but we are determined to continue until the whole truth come out.

"Nothing else will suffice."

Three US states are currently considering criminal action against manufacturers accused of rushing to market mesh implants and making £billions in profits without fully testing their controversial products.

A number of devices have already been withdrawn from the market.

Major US manufacturer Endo announced in March that it was closing down its trans-vaginal mesh business after a 'comprehensive review of the strategic business options' and 'continuing legal disruptions'.

One of the UK's most senior clinician's, Mark Slack, head of gynaecology at Addenbrooke's Hospital, Cambridge, recently condemned mesh

manufacturers for a 'tragedy created by greed', and warned they had not proven safety and effectiveness.

He also warned surgeons were too slow to report complications, and accused them of not challenging manufacturers

about their safety claims.

Mr Slack said he had taken a lot of 'flak' for being so outspoken, but added: "The mesh scandal will remain as a stain on our behaviour."

Polypropylene mesh has been used in surgery for hernia and other procedures for decades.

Medical manufacturers launched a new range of implants to treat prolapse and

"Boston Scientific have denied the allegations"

Steve Mostyn



Shocking evidence revealed medical sales reps were allowed inside operating theatres.

Surgeons have also been accused of taking millions in grants for clinical studies from medical manufacturers.

There has also been outcry over surgeons being funded to attend conferences in exotic places such as Brazil where medical manufacturers stage lavish events at top hotels.

Patients have called for financial such details to be made more 'transparent'.

Scotland currently faces the biggest medical negligence claim in legal history with over 400 mesh victims suing the NHS in the Court of Session.

Top civil lawyer Cameron Fyfe of Drummond Miller has appealed to the Scottish government to concede defeat in light of the £billions already paid out in the US, saving half the legal bill,

He said: "If all the cases go ahead here in Scotland, legal costs and compensation are likely to top £60million."

He is urging the government to cut the legal bill to taxpayers in half by settling claims and then pursuing manufacturers for the costs and future treatment to victims.

Unless they do so, manufacturers are likely to escape sanction.

Along with Chief Medical Officer Dr Catherine Calderwood, Scotland's beleaguered Health Secretary Shona Robison has issued an apology to women injured by mesh implants.

Ms Robison is due to consider the recommendations of the independent safety review into mesh implants, which is already two years overdue.

The shock resignation of the review chairwoman Dr Lesley Wilkie in November, weeks before her final report was due, has caused campaigners to fear a 'whitewash'.



Scottish Conservative MSP Jackson Carlaw with Elaine Holmes

"We've been fighting to save women in the future from suffering the life changing injuries which have devastated our own lives."

Olive McIlroy

bladder problems around twenty years ago using the same fine polypropylene mesh as a sling or hammock to support organs.

Women were told the new kits were the new 'gold standard', with

surgeons able to perform six procedures in the time it took to perform one old style operation which required very experienced surgeons.

The kits also meant less experienced surgeons could perform the operations.